



**The Second Sunday of the Fast:  
Saint Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica**

This divine Father, who was from Asia Minor, was from childhood reared in the royal court of Constantinople, where he was instructed in both religious and secular wisdom. Later, while still a youth, he left the imperial court and struggled in asceticism on Mount Athos, and in the Skete at Beroea. He spent some time in Thessalonica being treated for an illness that came from his harsh manner of life. He was present in Constantinople at the Council that was convened in 1341 against Barlaam of Calabria, and at the Council of 1347 against Acindynus, who was of like mind with Barlaam; Barlaam and Acindynus claimed that the grace of God is created. At both of these councils, the Saint contended vigorously for the true dogmas of the Church of Christ, teaching in particular that divine grace is not created, but is the uncreated energies of God which is poured throughout creation: otherwise it would be impossible, if grace were created, for man to have genuine communion with the uncreated God.<sup>1</sup> In 1347 he was appointed Metropolitan of Thessalonica. He tended his flock in an apostolic manner for some twelve years, and wrote many books and treatises on

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<sup>1</sup> The Patriarch of Constantinople, John Calekas, who was among the Latinminded, imprisoned Saint Gregory for four years because of the Saint's rebuke of the Latin teachers who taught that grace is created, thus depriving us of true communion with God, Who is uncreated, e.g. Thomas Aquinas, Barlaam, Acindynus, and others. This error of the Latin teachers is the predominant teaching in our day. (Ed.)

the most exalted doctrines of our Faith; and having lived a total of sixty-three years, he reposed in the Lord in 1359. His holy relics are kept in the Cathedral of Thessalonica. A full service was composed for his feast day by the Patriarch Philotheus in 1368, when it was established that his feast be celebrated on this day. Since works without right faith avail nothing, we set Orthodoxy of faith as the foundation of all that we accomplish during the Fast, by celebrating the Triumph of Orthodoxy the Sunday before and the great defender of the teaching of the holy Fathers today.

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*The Resurrection Dismissal Hymn and Kontakion of the Tone of the Week*

SECOND TONE

*Dismissal Hymn of the Resurrection*

**W**HEN Thou didst descend unto death, O Life Immortal, then didst Thou slay Hades with the lightening of Thy Divinity. And when Thou didst also raise the dead out of the nethermost depths, all the powers of the Heavens cried out: O Life-giver, Christ our God, glory be to Thee.

*Kontakion*

**T**HOU art risen from the tomb, O omnipotent Saviour, and Hades was amazed on beholding the wonder; and the dead arose, and creation at the sight thereof, rejoiceth with thee. And Adam is joyful, and the world, O my Saviour, praiseth Thee for ever.

*Dismissal Hymn. Plagal of Fourth Tone*

**L**IGHT of Orthodoxy, pillar and teacher of the Church, adornment of monastics, invincible champion of theologians, O Gregory thou wonderworker, boast of Thessalonica, herald of grace; ever pray that our souls be saved.

*Kontakion of Saint Gregory. Plagal of Fourth Tone  
To thee, the Champion Leader*

**W**ITH one accord, we praise thee as the sacred and divine \* vessel of wisdom and clear trumpet of theology, \* O our righteous Father Gregory of divine speech. \* As a mind that standeth now before the Primal Mind, \* do thou ever guide aright and lead our mind to Him, \* that we all may cry: \* Rejoice, O herald of grace divine.



SAINT JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN AND EVANGELIST  
BELOVED DISCIPLE OF THE LORD  
AND  
SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS  
THE PATRON SAINTS  
OF  
THE HOLY TRANSFIGURATION MONASTERY.

Nothing is more manifest than truth, or stronger;  
Just as there is nothing more obscure and weaker than  
falsehood. Subjected to criticism, falsehood easily collapses.  
Saint John Chrysostom.

On this, the Second Sunday of the Great Fast, we celebrate the Second Triumph of Orthodoxy, the victory over the Latin-minded thinkers. How does a person who is “Latin-minded” think? Where does his thought begin, how does it proceed, and what is its resting point, its end or purpose? The answer to these questions is simple. We can follow the trail of Latin-minded folks down through history. In Christian terms, the first Latin-minded thinker who bore the name ‘Christian’ was Augustine (354-430). He was bishop of a town on the Mediterranean coast of Africa named Hippo Regius.

Bishop Augustine was a very brilliant person. His teaching was Orthodox for a while, but there came a time when he departed from holy Tradition. He wrote in Latin, but knew no Greek (he had had a hard time with his Greek teacher when he was in school, so the story goes). He abandoned Orthodox thinking for pagan thinking.

His favorite philosopher was Plotinus (205-270). Plotinus left no written teaching. His disciple, Porphyry, organized his master’s lectures into verses which he entitled “*The Enneads*.” Plotinus followed a certain line of thought called Neo-Platonism.<sup>2</sup> When he died a snake crawled into a hole under his bed. Neo-Platonism was as popular in ‘highbrow’ circles then as Starbucks is today (the analogy is mixed, but it will have to do).

Augustine liked to be in control of things. Neo-Platonism does, at first, put its disciple in the driver’s seat in a number of important ways. First, the disciple can say, “I think God’s thoughts after Him because the ideas in my mind are the same ideas that are in God’s mind, and in the ‘mind of the universe’.” All that boils down to this: Authority is made to appear to rest in the mind of the individual.

Secondly, the deity and the world, according to the above, are correlative concepts. There is no distinction between God and the world. Good comes from God and evil comes from God (but this latter tenet is regularly suppressed). Neo-Platonism holds that we know about God through direct divine illumination.

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<sup>2</sup> Saint Dionysius the Areopagite (cf. Acts 17: 16-34), who saw the sun darkened at the time of the Cross, was baptized by St. Paul, and corresponded with St. John the Evangelist, calling him “the Sun of the Gospel,” and destroyed Neo-Platonism, root and branch, in his writings, notably in *On the Divine Names*. Every Neo-Platonic tenet, even its line of approach, was disassembled and brought “to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5) by Saint Dionysius.

Third, a strong dualism is present in this way of thinking. Good=spirit, mind, and soul. Evil=matter, and the body. Since the individual's mind runs everything, and since this dualism assigns a higher moral evaluation to the mind, Neo-Platonism, in this way, reinforces its self-congratulatory delusion over the human soul.

Fourth, a contradiction is introduced. Necessity, the pagan Goddess Ananke, rules over all. This can act as a comforting feature since it seems to add an under girding note of inevitability to whatever the individual's mind decides. But the myth of human control, given at first with the one hand, is finally taken away with the other. Neo-Platonism, under whatever guise, is paganism.

Let it be readily admitted that Neo-Platonism is the perennial philosophy in the Western world. Today, its dominance is plainly evident in academic circles most notably in the humanities, including religious studies. But what was going on in the Byzantine world of the mid-fifteenth century?

The Pope of Rome broke with the Eastern Patriarchates in 1054, the date of the Schism, and sided with Augustine's earlier rejection of holy Tradition in favor of Neo-Platonism. Although Augustine was drawn to Neo-Platonism, a school of thought initiated by the pagan philosopher, Plato (428 - 347 B.C.), when the thirteenth century had arrived, western thinkers, influenced by Albertus Magnus (1193-1280), had decided to look to another pagan philosopher, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) as the standard. Aristotle had been trained by Plato in the Academy; Plato called him "the mind of the Academy." Aristotle was the tutor of Alexander the Great.

Western scholars learned of Aristotle's methods through manuscripts from Spanish Muslim scholars. The Arabic of their notes was translated into Latin for Albertus Magnus and his best pupil, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).

The self-same four points employed by Neo-Platonism above were operative as the controlling principles, with certain minor modifications, in the system of Thomas Aquinas, which is known as Thomism. Pagan thought now controlled, and continues to control, every aspect of the life of Western man.

Saint Gregory Palamas was confronted by two Thomistic thinkers, Barlaam, and Acindynus. They rejected the Orthodox teaching that the Light of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor (Mt. 17:1-9; Mk. 9:2-10; Lk. 9:28-36; 2 Pet. 1:17-18) is uncreated. They said that this light was created; it was, perhaps, just an atmospheric disturbance.

Why did they then, and still continue to do so today, take this position? According to their way of doing things, authority rests in the human mind, and speaking of the deity and of the world are two ways of saying the same thing. They have, long ago, since 1054, rejected holy Tradition. Their notion of 'grace'

means ‘created grace’ since their deity and the world are, as we have seen, one and the same.

Saint Gregory Palamas responded with the “hierarchical distinction” from St. Dionysius the Areopagite of the divine essence as distinct from the divine energies. The divine essence is unknowable and unparticipatable, the Hidden of Almighty God (Jn. 1:18, 1 Jn. 4:12, 1 Tim. 6:16, Ex. 33:20.) The divine energies are varied; they are God empowering His creation.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, God Almighty the King of all, Whose Icon is in the dome of the Church (where that is possible), the Maker of heaven and earth out of nothing ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων (II Maccabees 7:28), the Sustainer of the blue sky, the green grass, all the running streams in the mountains and hills, and waves in the ocean, “Who quickeneth all things” (1 Tim. 6:13), keeps everything from falling back into the inconceivable nothing from whence it came. He Himself, the King, upholds “all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3). Where, my beloved, the King is, there is the Kingdom come in power. His power is manifested in His compassion: “And He healed them all” (Mt. 12:15). Amen.

These divine, uncreated energies are present on Mount Tabor. The divine energies flood the Church. They are present in the holy Icons; they are in us as we live our lives as Orthodox Christians, and as we pray. We are, so Saint Peter says, “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). And, as the Supplicatory Canon to the Holy Great Martyr George the Trophy Bearer affirms in one of its hymns, “He died that we might live His life.” This tells us that, creatures as we are, we can have communion with and live in the uncreated God through His uncreated energies.

To accept the holy Tradition of the Church means to give up the false notion that the human mind is the seat of authority, and that God and the world are merely two correlative concepts. The followers of the Latin-minded thinkers are, indeed, free to make the choice that they have made. The human will is free.

The holy Martyrs follow holy Tradition. Saint Felicity of Carthage (203), who was suffering in labor in the prison, was challenged by one of the guards: “You suffer so much now—what will you do when you are tossed to the beasts? Little did you think of them when you refused to sacrifice.”

“What I am suffering now,” she replied, “I suffer by myself. But then Another will be inside me Who will suffer for me, just as I shall be suffering for Him.”

Saint Felicity speaks to us of our life in God as members of the Body of Christ. Holy Baptism has made us philosophers; we are indeed, with Saint Felicity, philosophers of the Truth.

May God grant us also such eagerness as hers to please Him. Amen.